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ABSTRACT

This speech, focused on the role of the principal in an accountable system, urges that objectives must be established for principals as well as for students and teachers. The author discusses the need for specifying distinctive leadership behaviors that contribute to the total institutional productivity. Only through the principal's initiative, the author urges, can the conflict between the push for more humaneness in schools and the demand for school accountability be resolved. (JF)

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ACCOUNTABILITY THROUGH PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES: OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROACTIVE BEHAVIOR

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Accountability and its various manifestations — performance contracting, merit salaries, voucher plans, etc. — are the subjects of intense debates. Critics hail it as "inhumane," while zealots proclaim it as the latest educational "panacea." It is appropriate that we not stampede into something so far reaching in its implications as accountability without serious debate and thought regarding its major implications. Despite debate and caution, the accountability movement is sufficiently massive that principals can surely not consider themselves immune of immediate effects. Some view it as a threat, but through this presentation we examine applications of the movement which may serve to the advantage of the person in the principalship.

Most descriptions of the accountability concept are variations of the following:

> Accountability is the product of a process. At its most basic level, it means that an agent, public or private, entering into a contractual agreement to perform a service will be held answerable for performing according to agreed-upon terms, within an established time period, and with a stipulated use of resources and performance standards.[1]

However, accountability may be viewed simply as moving from a promise to a performance. It is a movement from ambiguity to specificity in common perceptions of role. The acceptance of the

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basic principle of common perception regarding projected demonstrated performance has program implications that are truly revolutionary.

Accountability concepts are the products of an even more fundamental movement intending to make schools more responsive to their disenchanted clientele and communities. The concepts are consistent with the work culture of simple and absolute institutions where strong frameworks are put up for weak and dependent people to function effectively. However, another force of equal insistence has been operating concurrently.

The second force is the educational thrust toward more personal power for students -- to manage their own education, shape their own environments, and evolve their own value systems. A demand by teachers and principals for at least as much autonomy for themselves is another manifestation of this force. These concepts are consistent with the work culture of institutions characterized by increasing relativism, ambiguity, and recognition of the importance of developing independently strong people.

Let it be clearly recognized that there are two conflicting philosophical positions now operating and directing demands on the principalship. While leaders are being called on to make an accounting for the time, money, and energy poured into their institutions, there is an opposing force to make schools more humane with great stress on spontaneity, flexibility, and creative experience. One alternative over the other is unacceptable; the execution of skills, alone, is empty, while love is not enough. Some

resolution of the accountability-humaneness forces must be sought. This is the base of opportunity for proactive, mature professionals.

Principals could view the accountability movement as an opportunity for proactiveness rather than the usual reactiveness. For example, most principals would welcome a definitive statement of educational mission translated into performance terms, of position in the educational community, of essential competencies to be attained in preservice programs, and of integrity regarding administrative inservice programs. These conditions should be welcomed, but only on the assumption that a critical element of the accountability process is honored: principals must share in the formulation of the objectives for which they are to be accountable.

For the proactive professional, accountability could be the vehicle for restoring to the principal the much needed sense of self-actualization. Rather than merely reacting to the accountability demands of others, principals, themselves, could use the movement to initiate the kinds of actions that would generate autonomy, clarification, and increased professionalism in principalship roles.

During the initial stages of the accountability movement we raced toward the busy development of behavioral descriptions of learning for students. We then realized that it was just as essential to specify those teacher behaviors which would facilitate the development of identified student objectives.[2] Now we are required to identify those leadership behaviors which are needed to facilitate the

development of the appropriate teacher competencies. The assumption is that all levels of the educational hierarchy are properly concerned with the development of certain student behaviors, while teachers, only, are held directly accountable for results. As in the case for teachers, every other dimension of the educational institution must examine the distinctive effects of its actions and decisions on others. The distinctive behaviors of principals are those that affect the continuing development of teacher competencies, and it is these leadership behaviors that must be identified. It is for these that school leaders must not only accept responsibility, but actually seek to be held accountable. If pupil learning is an appropriate criterion for assessing the effectiveness of teachers, improved teacher competency is an appropriate criterion for assessing the effectiveness of instructional leaders.

Figure 1 illustrates the relationship of distinctive effects between students, teachers, and principals. Additional functions could be added to the levels of accountability: instructional assistants, department chairmen, etc. The figure suggests that specific diagnostic, prescriptive, implementive, and evaluative skills need to be identified for teachers and perhaps by teachers. Essentially the same is true for principals; a similar set of performance skills must be established for areas of accountability -- instructional program, personnel development, school-community relations, and school management.

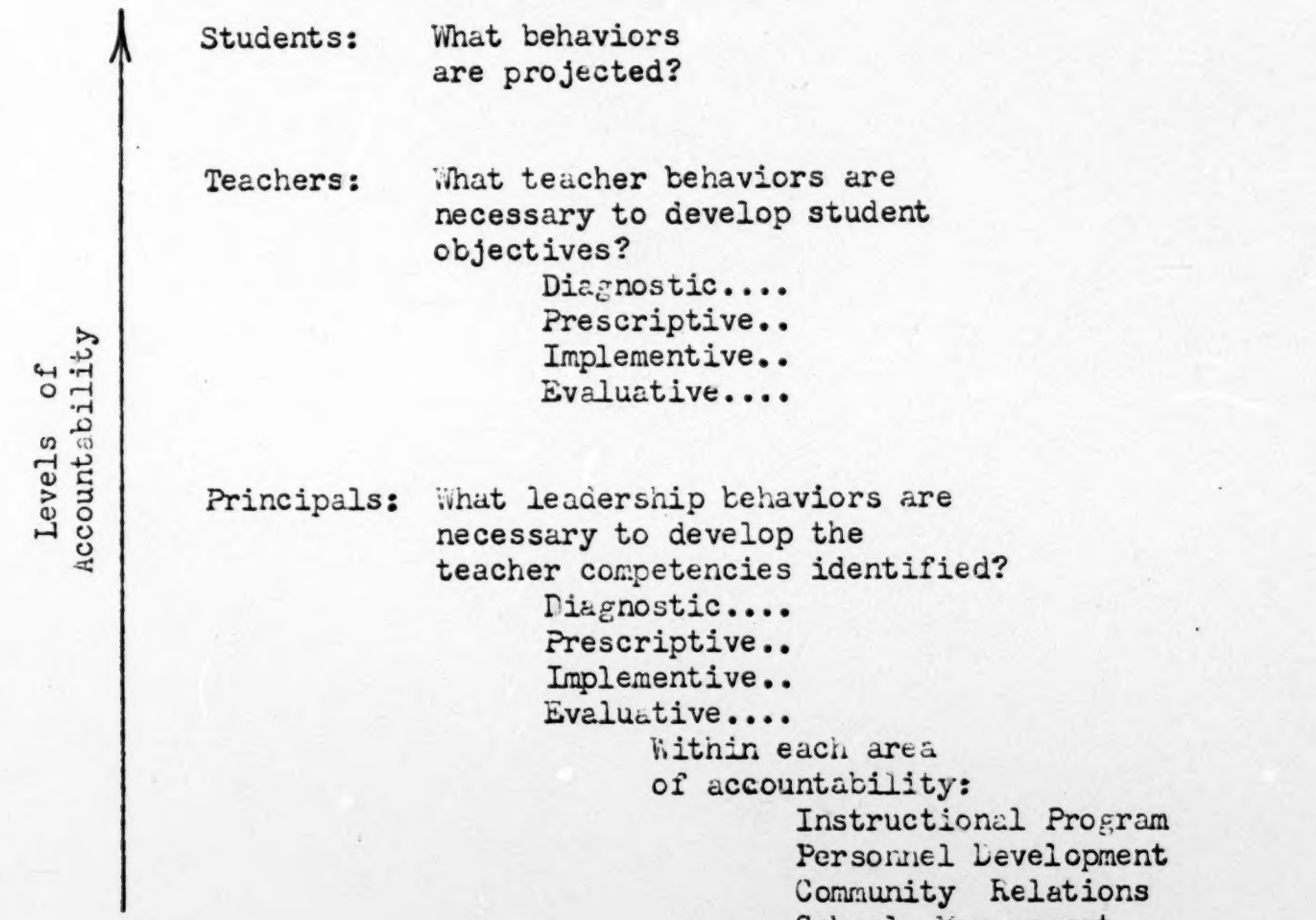

FIGURE 1

FRAMEWORK FOR IDENTIFYING AND RELATING DISTINCTIVE PERFORMANCE

Resolution of the accountability-humaneness conflict in the principalship is a function of the proactivity of principals, themselves. It requires the specification of those distinctive behaviors which characterize independently strong, autonomous instructional leaders and for which they are willing to be held accountable under the conditions in which they must operate.

Rationale for Performance Objectives

Attempts to define leader effectiveness have typically utilized traits such as "understanding and appreciating democracy," "cooperation," "appreciation of student needs," and "understanding psychological principles." These traits and qualities are meaningless concepts unless they can be anchored to some denotable behavior. It is useless, for example, to have an estimate of a person's intelligence unless one knows how it manifests itself in instructional leadership. Ambiguous verbage along with the traditional prerequisites of successful experience as a teacher, formal academic training, and political influence have been the mode for preservice training, selection, and continuing development of school principals. While great promises are produced from these practices, they seldom yield the necessary evidence of what it is that an individual can do or will do as a modern school leader. Some consequences: an amazing tendency to defend almost any practice because there is no standard against which to measure performance, and the charge that most preparation and inservice programs are irrelevant since the establishment of appropriate outcomes has typically not been thought through.

Unless school officials actually demonstrate that selection criteria are predictive of or significantly related to a principal's effectiveness and are non-discriminatory, it is likely to be ruled that the use of such criteria is illegal.[3] It is understandable, therefore, that recent reports reflect the vulnerability of current criteria for selecting school principals. Boards of education seldom have evidence of what it is that a school principal or prospective school principal can do. It becomes increasingly important, therefore, that one be able to show evidence of the goal's being achieved and not merely promised. The use of performance objectives is one means of reducing the uncertainty and irrelevance of training, selection, and statements of accountable practice.

Generating Performance Objectives

Simultaneous with finding new and more adequate ways for dealing with the young, we need to create new plans for exercising instructional leadership that affects teacher behavior. One approach to systematic planning of an accountability program is suggested by Figure 2. It should be viewed as a system of four sequential or cyclic processes — diagnostic, prescriptive, implementive, and evaluative. It is assumed that there are essential, distinctive, and identifiable performance skills that are appropriate for school principals and which cluster about these four processes.

An incomplete set of performance objectives follows as an example of a principal's accountability. The statements of objectives are grouped according to processes and, thus, serve as an operational

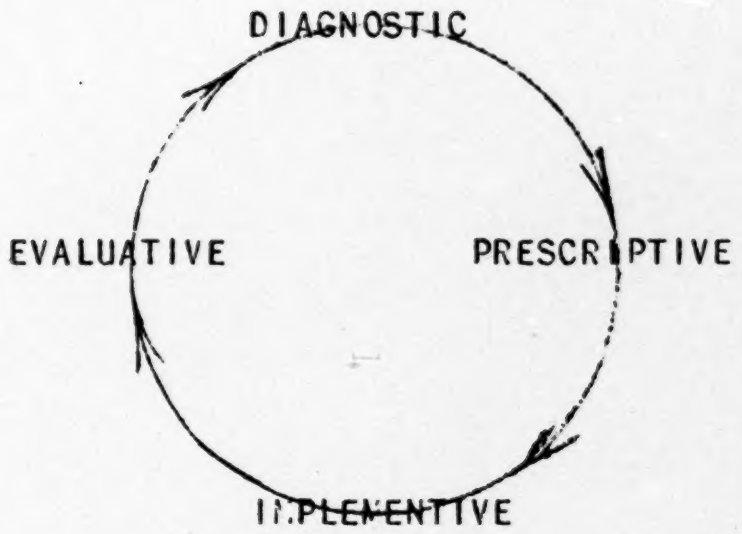

FIGURE 2

FOUR CYCLIC PROCESSES OR CLUSTERS
OF PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES

definition for each process. The approach is presented as a suggestive guide to proactive others who will initiate the necessary tasks in identifying the leadership performances for which they should be accountable.[4]

Diagnostic Process

1. Activate at least two groups within his faculty, each to arrive at a statement of a school-wide instructional deficiency.
2. Distinguish between skill deficiencies and performance deficiencies for at least 25 percent of his faculty.
3. Identify and describe unique competencies for at least 25 percent of his faculty members.
4. Distinguish between those duties that must be performed by him and those duties that may be performed by others.
5. Poll a representative group of a defined school community to determine problems and attitudes concerning school issues.

Prescriptive Process

1. Present and describe at least two prescriptions (possible solutions) for a school instructional problem or deficiency.
2. Activate at least two groups within his faculty to reach change-oriented instructional decisions on the basis of an analysis of school-wide data.
3. Construct and submit to the superintendent at least two recommendations designed to increase professional growth among teachers.
4. Design an inservice program with "multiplier effects" for a group of at least ten percent of his faculty.
5. Distinguish between those decisions that are and those that are not his direct responsibility in reference to both superior and subordinate personnel.
    a. Allow teachers to make decisions about students for whom they are accountable — decisions that do not customarily transcend a classroom or learning center.
    b. Restrict his decisions to those matters that transcend one or more instructional units within the attendance unit.
    c. Describe the obligation of superiors to make decisions that transcend one or more attendance units within the district.

Implementive Process

1. Execute a minimum of one innovative solution to a school instructional problem in which a minimum of three faculty members is involved.
2. Utilize faculty members (from at least four learning areas or grade levels) with unique competencies in a manner designed to achieve "multiplier effects."
3. Distinguish between the student-oriented posture of the teacher and the teacher-oriented posture of the principal in responses to instructional problems.
4. Extend authority for at least 75 percent of those administrative tasks that may be performed by others.
5. Schedule and meet with the school advisory panel at least four times during the academic year.

Evaluative Process

1. Evaluate on the basis of analysis and interpretation of data a minimum of one innovative instructional improvement project.
2. Execute a process of examination and analysis of school-wide testing data involving all faculty members.
3. Demonstrate improvement in the design and implementation of the school-wide evaluation program.
4. Construct an outline for an overall school improvement program for the forthcoming academic year.
5. Describe a minimum of three strengths and three weaknesses in his own administrative behavior.

The adequacy of an evaluation depends ultimately upon the clarity and precision of previously stated objectives; and when objectives are stated as performance tasks, evaluation reduces itself to determining whether the individual did or did not execute the projected behaviors. While behaviors may be specified, it is continually difficult to describe minimum levels of acceptable performance; the difficulty intensifies as more complex behaviors are sought. The success of the approach described above will ultimately rest on the strength of the knowledge base in evaluation and measurement. Until relationships between teacher behavior and leader behavior can be more firmly established

through research and improved measurement, some judgments will have to be made on *a priori* grounds.

Summary

The profession will continue to face rising expectations. Higher standards of excellence will be demanded by those served, and procedures will be generated to satisfy demands for accountability as the movement intensifies. Only through the proactivity of principals, themselves, will the resulting accountability-humaneness conflict be reduced to its most viable resolution for the principalship. One approach has been proposed for initiating the task of specifying the distinctive leadership behaviors which contribute to the total institutional productivity. Even if the accountability movement, itself, culminates as only another great educational promise, it will have offered self-actualizing opportunities for the principalship.

Notes

1. Leon Lessinger, "Engineering Accountability for Results in Public Education," Phi Delta Kappan, 52 (December, 1970), p. 217.

2. An example is the Performance-Based Teacher Education Project of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, Washington, D. C.

3. Edwin M. Bridges and Melany E. Baehr, "The Future of Administrator Selection Procedures," Administrator's Notebook, 19 (January, 1971).

4. For a more detailed description of this and related approaches, the following may be consulted:
Bulletin of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, 56 (March, 1972).
Louis Barrilleaux, "Behavioral Outcomes for Administrative Internships: School Principals," Educational Administration Quarterly, 8 (Winter, 1972), pp. 59-71.